## Pantex to resume work soon graduler By Anne Reifenberg Washington Bureau of The Dallas Morning News WASHINGTON — The disassembly of nuclear weapons at the Pantex plant near Amarillo, halted last month when a ventilation system failed Ventilation problem as officials that no more than 12,000 will be deposited on the site. At a Senate hearing Thursday, de partment officials said they were con-

when a ventilation system failed, could resume next week, federal officials said Thursday.

The eight-week shutdown could prevent the U.S. Energy Department from meeting its goal of dismantling 2.000 retired nuclear weapons this year, the officials said. The delay does not violate international weapons treaties, they said.

Pantex stopped dismantling work April 4 after the contractor, Mason & Hanger-Silas Mason Co., found a bad air filter in a disassembly room at the plant where the Pentagon sends warheads it no longer needs in the post Cold War-era. Officials said that led to the discovery elsewhere at the 16,000acre facility of a faulty shut-off valve. The valve is supposed to close the ventilation system to prevent the spread of radioactive material in case of an accident.

Government inspectors examining the ventilation failures then learned that three months of maintenance records had been accidentally dumped from the Pantex computer system. said Energy Department spokesman Tom Walton of the department's Amarillo office.

He said the records check had been completed and other routine maintenance tasks, originally scheduled to be performed throughout the year, had been taken care of during the shutdown.

"Unless something major jumps up in the next couple days, we will start transferring facilities back to the operational mode late next week," Mr. Walton said.

Experts from other nuclear weapons facilities who have been studying safety systems at Pantex are expected to wrap up their review by Friday.

An official with the Metal Trades Council, which represents 1,300 work-

ers at the plant, said the company responded quickly to the air filter problems.

"They said, 'Let's stop what we are doing and take a big, long look and make sure what we are doing is right," said Ronnie Payne, president and chief steward of the council. "The history of this plant has been very production-oriented. Sometimes safety was put secondary to production."

Pantex, 17 miles from Amarillo, is the nation's prime nuclear weapons dismantling site and a major repository for old warheads' plutonium cores.

About 7,000 of the softball-size cores are stored in igloos scattered across an open field. Though there is enough space for 20,000 cores at Pantex, the Energy Department has promised Tex. in Amarillo contributed to this report.

houses for the radioactive cores and other plutonium waste.

The United States produced about 102 metric tons of plutonium during the Cold War.

Wolfgang K.H. Panofsky of Stanford University, who headed a National Academy of Sciences panel that studied plutonium disposal options, told the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee that "storage can be very safe" if proper precautions are taken.

Mr. Panofsky said the greatest potential danger surrounding plutonium, which poses a radiation risk for 24,000 years, lies in the possibility of the material getting into the wrong

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